



File Code: 1950

Date: April 15, 2013

Announcing the West Bend Vegetation Management Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement Public Comment Period

Dear Reader:

This letter is to inform you that the West Bend Vegetation Management Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) has been completed and is now available for review and comment. This letter provides a brief summary of the project, information on the official 45-day public comment period, and how to obtain a copy of the DEIS. The project was first announced in the Federal Register, Notice of Intent (NOI), on November 24, 2010. Since that time the Forest has been planning and working with a collaborative group of stakeholders to develop a plan that will address public issues while accomplishing important work in the forest west of Bend, Oregon.

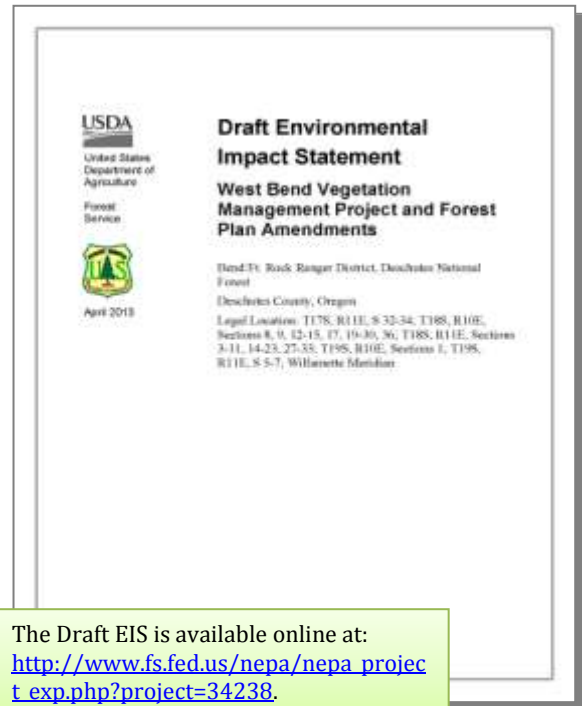
The Forest Service proposal to conduct vegetation and fuels management in the West Bend project area is intended to protect and maintain valuable natural resources and recreational opportunities.

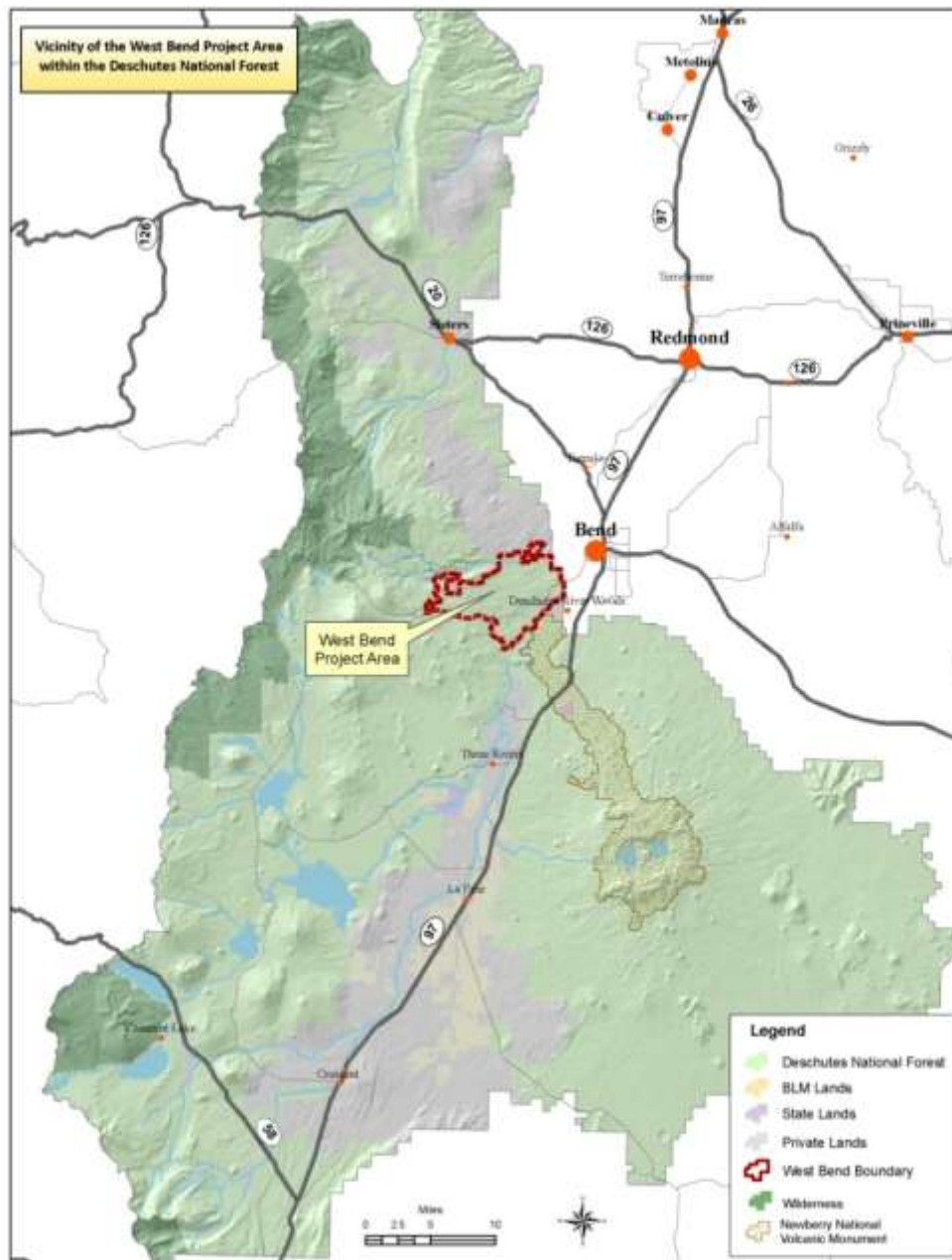
Background Information

The 25,696-acre West Bend project area is located to the west of Bend, Oregon and adjacent to its urban growth boundary. The project area extends to the Bend Watershed Inventoried Roadless area on the west (see map next page). The project falls within the following management allocations of the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP): Deer Habitat, General Forest, Scenic Views, Intensive Recreation, Winter Recreation, Front Country Seen, and Wild and Scenic River. It also falls partially within the area of the Northwest Forest Plan.

The project area is very popular with recreationists due to its proximity to the city limits of Bend. The Cascade Lakes National Scenic Byway and Skyliner Road corridors provide access to many recreational opportunities, including 140 miles of summer and winter trails.

Forests within this area are overly dense and at risk to insects, disease, and wildfire. The Forest Service has responded to this by formulating a plan to thin out trees and reduce fuels across a large proportion of the area. The DEIS details the proposed activities, how public issues have been addressed in the design of the project, and describes the expected environmental effects.





Vicinity Map of the West Bend Project Area

Summary of Alternatives Analyzed in the Draft EIS

Following scoping of the proposed action, the interdisciplinary team developed additional action alternatives to address concerns presented by the public. In addition to the No Action alternative, there are three action alternatives analyzed in the DEIS that are expected to meet the purpose and need in varying degrees.

The proposed action (Alternative 2) would treat about 21,850 acres, Alternative 3 would treat about 21,817 acres, and Alternative 4 would treat about 21,509 acres. The following table displays the kinds of tree harvest to occur under each alternative. Fuels treatments may occur alone or in combination with thinning/harvest.

Table 1: Activities Proposed by Alternative

Project Activity*	Alternative 2 (Acres)	Alternative 3 (Acres)	Alternative 4 (Acres)
Commercial harvest in combination with fuels treatment	14,745	14,522	12,167
Thinning within older plantations in combination with fuels treatment	2,302	2,302	1,806
Understory treatment only (e.g. precommercial thinning or ladder fuel reduction in combination with fuels treatment)	652	827	1,143
Fuels treatment only (e.g. mowing and/or prescribed underburning)	4,151	4,166	6,393
Total Activity Acres	21,850	21,817	21,509

*Fuels and understory treatments may occur in combination with thinning/harvest.

Most commercial harvest is in ponderosa pine-dominated stands in the form of thinning from below, meaning that the smallest trees are removed first, moving up in size until the desired tree density is reached. Thinning is usually followed by brush mowing and/or prescribed underburning. Lodgepole pine stands are managed with seed tree harvest and overstory removal.

Understory Treatments refer to activities such as ladder fuels reduction and precommercial thinning. Primarily these are stands where the understory is competing with the overstory, or is creating a fuel hazard. Fuels treatments involve ladder fuel reduction, brush and shrub mowing, slash piling and burning, and prescribed underburning.

Resource Protection Measures are incorporated into each action alternative for the purpose of reducing or eliminated unwanted effects from the activities and to ensure project activities are implemented to comply with standards and guidelines and best management practices.

The DEIS describes all of these activities and provides detailed prescriptions for each individual unit. The DEIS also describes necessary road work, temporary road construction, and Forest Plan Amendments that are necessary for implementing the project.

Collaboration

The West Bend project area falls within the larger Deschutes Collaborative Forest landscape that was selected by the Secretary of Agriculture and an advisory committee as a "Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration" (CFLR) project. The project has been developed and will be implemented through a collaborative process which has already provided learning, discussion, and engagement in the planning process.

A group of community stakeholders representing diverse interests such as environmental, recreation, timber, have been working together to find common ground and break through historic gridlock. The goal of the collaborative is to forge new agreements and create a shared vision for stewardship that will sustain our forests into the future. To learn more about the collaborative project, visit <http://www.deschutescollaborativeforest.org/>.

Table 2. Comparison of how the alternatives meet the purpose and need for action

Purpose & Need for Action	Alt. 1	Alt. 2	Alt. 3	Alt. 4
<i>Maintain or restore forest health</i>				
Percentage of ponderosa area stands resistance to insect mortality (stocking level reduce below upper management zone)	33%	86%	85%	73%
Percentage of ponderosa pine stands best suited to move towards Late and Old Structure (LOS) or continue to grow older (ponderosa pine open canopy; all sizes).	32%	49%	48%	44%
Acres of increased resistance to fire mortality - ponderosa pine-dominated stands (increased growth and ave. diameter)	0 acres	13,235 acres	13,235 acres	10,418 acres
Treatment that will reduce mistletoe spread in ponderosa and lodgepole stands	0 acres	7,848 acres	7,790	6,748
<i>Reduce the threat of large scale wildfire</i>				
Fire hazard rating (% project area)	57% low	87% low	87% low	87% low
Wildfire risk rating (% project area)	40% low	87% low	86% low	87% low
<i>Contribute wood products and restoration work to the local and regional economy</i>				
Timber volume produced	0 mmbf	31.2 mmbf	31.8 mmbf	26.4 mmbf
Jobs created or maintained	0	188	190	155

How to Comment and Timeframe

The DEIS describes the activities and effects of the alternatives in detail. You will find the DEIS on the Forest Service Website at: http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa_project_exp.php?project=34238. If you prefer a hardcopy or an electronic copy of the document on CD, please contact Beth Peer at (541)383-4769.

A Notice of Availability for the 45-day public comment period for this project is expected to be placed in the [Federal Register](#) on April 19, 2013. The 45-day comment period will begin on the date of publication of this notice. Do not rely on any other source for the beginning date of the comment period. A legal notice will be published in *The Bulletin* newspaper following publication of the Notice of Availability. Comments, including attachments, must be postmarked or delivered within 45 days of the publication of the Notice of Availability in the Federal Register. Individuals and organizations wishing to be eligible to object, must meet the information requirements at 36 CFR 218.

Comments should be addressed to Kevin Larkin, District Ranger, Bend-Fort Rock Ranger District, 63095 Deschutes Market Road, Bend, Oregon, 97701. Comments can also be faxed to (541) 383-4700, sent electronically to comments-pacificnorthwest-deschutes-bend-ftrock@fs.fed.us, or hand delivered to 63095 Deschutes Market Road, Bend, Oregon, Bend, Oregon between 7:45 AM and 4:30 PM, Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.

For email submission, the comments must be submitted as part of the actual email message, or as an attachment in Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx), rich text format (.rtf), or portable document format (.pdf) only. In cases where no identifiable name is attached to an electronic message, verification of identity will

be required. Emails submitted to email addresses other than the one listed above, or in formats other than those listed, or containing viruses, will be rejected. It is the responsibility of the commenter to confirm receipt of comments submitted by electronic mail. Please enter "West Bend Project DEIS Comments" into the subject line of your email.

Appeal procedures at 36 CFR 215 have been replaced by a pre-decisional administrative review process outlined at 36 CFR 218, effective March 27, 2013. The West Bend project is subject to the new rule which expands the use of the pre-decisional objection process used for projects authorized under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003. The new rule provides the public an opportunity to comment and express concerns on projects before decisions are made, rather than after. The Forest Service believes this aligns with our collaborative approach to forest management and increases the likelihood of resolving those concerns, resulting in better, more informed decisions.

The new rule provides concerned public an opportunity to seek higher level review of unresolved concerns before the project decision has been signed, rather than having to appeal a signed decision. Comments received during this public review of the Draft EIS will be considered and a final EIS and draft Record of Decision will be released for a 45 day review and objection period. For more information on 36 CFR 218, see the Federal Register, Volume 78, No. 59, March 27, 2013.

Anyone wishing to obtain additional information on the project or to provide comments over the phone should contact Beth Peer, Project Leader at (541) 383-4769.

Sincerely,

/s/ Kevin W. Larkin
KEVIN W. LARKIN
District Ranger